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## **Sexual Violence Language Wielded as a Discrimination Against the LGBTQ+ Community**

*The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence strongly opposes the dangerous rhetoric being used to motivate anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation, policies, and violence.*

Hartford, CT (December 12, 2022) — The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence is deeply concerned about a dangerous tactic individuals, organizations, and media are using to motivate anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation, policies, and violence in the United States: weaponizing language from the anti-sexual violence field, including “grooming” and “pedophile,” to paint LGBTQ+ people, and education about gender, sexuality, and the existence of the LGBTQ+ community, as inherently dangerous to children. We resolutely reject this rhetoric and call on our colleagues and allies in the fight to end sexual violence to do the same.

Child sexual abuse is a global public health crisis which impacts 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys. In the majority of these cases, children are abused by people their family knows and trusts, and research has consistently shown that LGBTQ+ people are not more likely to abuse than straight people. In reality, LGBTQ+ people – both youth and adults – are significantly more likely to experience sexual violence. LGBTQ+ youth are nearly four times more likely to experience child sexual abuse than their straight peers, and LGBTQ+ adults are up to three times more likely to experience sexual violence.

The recent murders of five people at Club Q in Colorado Springs, CO on the eve of Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual event memorializing those who have been murdered due to transphobic violence, is just one example of the violence that LGBTQ+ people face. So far this year, more than 300 bills have been drafted aimed at removing or restricting the rights of LGBTQ+ people and five states passed “Don’t Say Gay” bills removing conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity from classrooms.

“As both a queer and non-binary person and as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I find this rhetoric deeply troubling,” said Beth Hamilton, executive director of The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. “Anti-LGBTQ+ bias is not new, nor is the correlation between these statements and the violence that LGBTQ+ people face daily. But there is an alarming increase in the frequency and level of violence. We continue to serve trans and queer survivors who have less access to support, resources, and care post-assault due to bias, and we continue to get calls from concerned parents and educators across the state whose schools are calling for the removal of conversations and content about LGBTQ+ people under the misguided pretense of protecting children.”

One proven way for adults to protect kids from sexual abuse is to recognize and intervene when someone – another adult or an older child – is grooming a child, as grooming is often a precursor to sexual abuse. Grooming is a tactic in which someone methodically builds a trusting relationship with a child, their family, and community to manipulate, coerce, or force the child to engage in sexual activities. The person grooming identifies vulnerabilities, erodes the child’s boundaries, and builds up to acts of sexual abuse and control while convincing the world around the child that they are safe in their care. When homophobic and transphobic people and organizations accuse the LGBTQ+ community of “grooming” children, they are never speaking about these actual grooming behaviors.

In recent months, the coalition’s prevention educators, who devote their time to teaching and supporting communities invested in preventing sexual violence, have received increasing requests to remove references to gender and LGBTQ+ people and communities from their work with youth. Discussions about gender roles, healthy sexuality, bodily autonomy, and identities are integral to shifting cultures and ending sexual violence. When children participate in comprehensive sexuality education and violence prevention programs, particularly when those programs span a child’s entire K-12 education, they are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence. These programs address key risk and protective factors for sexual violence, including building empathy, developing decision-making and conflict-resolution skills, challenging traditional gender roles, and thinking critically about harmful messages in the media about sex and relationships. These programs may also help young people who experience grooming or sexual abuse get help sooner.

To prevent sexual violence, we must recalibrate how we think about gender roles, healthy boundaries, bodily autonomy, and the inherent right to live authentically in the world. Young people need to know that they have a right to be safe in their homes, schools, and communities, regardless of how they identify.

If you or someone you know needs support, The Alliance is here to help. Call or text 888.999.5545 or visit [endsexualviolencect.org](http://endsexualviolencect.org).

## **ABOUT THE CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance) is the state’s anti-sexual violence coalition of nine community-based sexual assault crisis services centers whose mission is to create communities free of sexual violence by providing culturally affirming, trauma-informed advocacy, prevention, and intervention services centered on the voices of victims and survivors. The Alliance carries out this mission through statewide victim assistance, community prevention and education, and public policy advocacy. The Alliance envisions and hopes to create a world in which everyone believes sexual violence is a preventable problem and actively plays a role in ending it. Learn more at [endsexualviolencect.org](http://endsexualviolencect.org)

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